

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 134217

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, SHUM, UR, IS, US

SUBJECT: LEVANON'S VIEWS ON SOVIET JEWISH EMIGRATION

1. NEHEMIAH LEVANON, ADVISER TO PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL AND EFFECTIVE HEAD OF ISRAELI SOVIET AND EASTERN EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION EFFORT, WAS MILDLY UPBEAT ABOUT PRESENT EMIGRATION TREND BUT PESSIMISTIC ABOUT SITUATION OF JEWISH ACTIVISTS DURING MAY 24 CONVERSATION IN DEPARTMENT, WHERE HE MET WITH EUR DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY LUERS IN COMPANY OF ISRAELI EMBASSY MINISTER GAVRIELI.

2. LEVANON SUGGESTED THAT RECENT HIGH EMIGRATION RATE (1,938 VIENNA ARRIVALS IN APRIL) DURING INCREASING INTERNAL REPRESSION (REFLECTED BY ORLOV TRIAL, ETC) MAY CONSTITUTE SOVIET GOVERNMENT SIGNAL THAT IT IS WILLING TO TOLERATE
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CERTAIN LEVEL OF EMIGRATION, BUT NOT HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND DISSIDENT ACTIVITY WITHIN USSR. SOVIETS ARE TELLING THE WEST: EMIGRATION YES, ACTIVISM NO.

3. HE REPORTED THAT ARRIVING IMMIGRANTS REPORT THAT EMIGRATION IS MOVING, AND THE OVIRS ARE OFTEN EVEN HELPFUL. THE ISRAELIS ARE RECEIVING MANY MORE REQUESTS FOR VYZOV--

ABOUT 9,000 IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS--AND THERE ARE FEWER REPORTS OF POSTAL NON-DELIVERY. LEVANON SUGGESTED THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD LIKE TO HAVE JEWISH EMIGRATION BE LIKE GERMAN EMIGRATION -- A QUIET, ORDERLY PROCESS WHERE THE BARGAINING IS ONLY OVER HOW MANY TO LET OUT.

4. LUERS ASKED WHETHER THE DEBATE OVER THE DROPOUTS (I.E., EMIGRANTS WHO LEAVE WITH EXIT VISAS FOR ISRAEL BUT PROCEED TO THIRD COUNTRIES) HAD BEEN REVIVED IN ISRAEL. LEVANON (WHO IN THE PAST WAS THE ENERGETIC PRIME MOVER OF EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE DROP-OUT RATE) RESPONDED THAT PUBLIC INTEREST HAD BEEN REAWAKENED BY DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUE AT THE ZIONIST CONGRESS, THE KNESSET, ETC., BUT HE DECLINED TO CHARACTERIZE THE DISCUSSION AS A DEBATE.

5. HE OBSERVED THAT THE DROP-OUT RATE DURING THE PAST TWO MONTHS HAD BEEN 60 PERCENT. FROM KHARKOV, IT WAS ALMOST 100 PERCENT. MOLDAVIANS, HOWEVER, ARE CONTINUING TO ISRAEL -- THEIR DROP-OUT RATE ACTUALLY DECLINED FROM 12 PERCENT IN 1976 TO 9 PERCENT IN 1977. THEY AND THE JEWS FROM GEORGIA, UZBEKISTAN AND AZERBAIJAN OFFSET SOMEWHAT THE HIGH DROP-OUT RATES FROM OTHER AREAS. LEVANON SAID HE THOUGHT THAT OVERALL THE DROP-OUT RATE WOULD CONTINUE TO RISE AS THE EMIGRATION TENDS TO INCREASE FROM THE UKRAINE AND RSFSR, AND IN A FEW YEARS COULD BE 80 TO 90 PERCENT.

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6. ASKED WHAT COULD BE DONE, HE OBSERVED THAT THE HIGH RATE OF MOLDAVIANS PROCEEDING TO ISRAEL WAS ATTRIBUTABLE TO A GENERAL "GRAPEVINE MOOD", A FEELING ABOUT ISRAEL PASSED THROUGH THE LOCAL JEWISH GRAPEVINE. HE OBSERVED THAT OVERALL THE SOVIET EMIGRATION MOVEMENT IS NO LONGER AS SPIRITUALLY MOTIVATED AS BEFORE. MANY EMIGRANTS FROM THE RUSSIAN AND UKRAINIAN REPUBLICS ARE ECONOMICALLY MOTIVATED. SIX TO SEVEN PERCENT IN VIENNA PROCLAIM THAT THEY ARE NOT EVEN JEWS.

7. LEVANON SAID THAT ONE PROBLEM IS THE FAILURE TO GET INFORMATION ABOUT ISRAEL AND ABOUT JEWISH CULTURE INTO THE SOVIET UNION. ISRAELI BROADCASTS ARE EFFECTIVELY JAMMED. ALSO, SOVIET PROPAGANDA ABOUT ISRAEL IS NOW MORE SOPHISTICATED, I.E., LESS CRUDE AND VICIOUS, EVEN WHILE ANTI-SEMITIC PROPAGANDA IS ON THE RISE AND HAS BECOME MORE VICIOUS. THE REVIVAL IN ANTI-SEMITISM HE ATTRIBUTED IN PART TO ITS TRADITION IN RUSSIA (THE ORLOV TRIAL SPECTATORS YELLING "ZHID" WERE PART OF RUSSIA'S HISTORY),-AND IN PART TO A DESIRE BY THE AUTHORITIES TO KEEP THE SOVIET PEOPLE SUSPICIOUS OF THE JEWS -- AT LEAST THE UNASSIMILA-

TED JEWES -- AS ALIEN ENEMIES OF COMMUNISM.

8. HE COMMENTED THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE EFFECTIVELY KEPT DOWN EMIGRATION BY MAINTAINING A CLIMATE WHICH INHIBITS PEOPLE FROM APPLYING. THE ISRAELIS KNOW HOW MANY VIZOVIS ARE SENT, HOW MANY PEOPLE EMIGRATE, AND ABOUT HOW MANY ARE REFUSED. THE FIGURES SHOW THAT MANY DO NOT APPLY. THE SOVIET STATISTIC THAT ONLY 1.5 PERCENT ARE REFUSED IS TECHNICALLY TRUE, BUT DOES NOT CONVEY THE TRUE PICTURE.

9. LEVANON DESCRIBED PAST ISRAELI EFFORTS TO ARRANGE A DIRECT, OR ALMOST DIRECT MOSCOW-TO-TEL AVIV AIR ROUTE FOR THE EMIGRANTS. HE SAID THEY HAD TRIED THROUGH THE DUTCH, THE ROMANIANS, AND AUSTRIAN AIRLINES. WHEN THE DUTCH
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RAISED IT WITH THE SOVIETS AS A DIPLOMATIC MATTER, THEY WERE TOLD IT WAS A COMMERCIAL QUESTION AND REFERRED TO AEROFLOT. WHEN AEROFLOT WAS APPROACHED, THE RESPONSE WAS THAT IT WAS A DIPLOMATIC QUESTION. LEVANON SAID THE ISRAELIS WOULD STILL BE VERY INTERESTED IN PURSUING THE PROPOSAL IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE.

10. LUERS EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT ANATOLIY SHCHARANSKIY MIGHT BE GIVEN A SEVERE SENTENCE. THAT WOULD HAVE A SERIOUS IMPACT ON SOVIET JEWRY. HE CITED A CONVERSATION WITH RECENT EMIGRANT DINA BEILINA, WHO HAD EXPRESSED FEAR THAT A TREASON CONVICTION OF SHCHARANSKIY WOULD SET A PRECEDENT WHICH WOULD TERRORIZE SOVIET JEWS -- IF SHCHARANSKIY'S ACTIVITIES COULD BE FOUND TO BE TREASON, SO COULD THE ACTIVITIES OF MANY OTHERS. LEVANON COMPARED THE PREPARATION OF THE CASE AGAINST SHCHARANSKIY TO THE LENINGRAD HIJACKING TRIALS, WHEN MANY JEWS HAD BEEN INTERROGATED, NOT TO OBTAIN INFORMATION BUT TO INTIMIDATE THEM. WHAT IS WORSE IN THE CASE OF SHCHARANSKIY, HOWEVER, IS ALL THE PUBLICITY GIVEN IN THE OFFICIAL SOVIET PRESS. HE RECALLED THAT THE SOVIET PRESS HARDLY MENTIONED THE LENINGRAD HIJACKING TRIAL; THEREFORE, THE INTIMIDATION ASPECT AGAINST JEWS WAS SOMEWHAT LESS. ALSO, HE REMARKED, A SHCHARANSKIY TRIAL COULD HAVE A DOMINO EFFECT, IMPLICATING OTHERS. EVEN WORSE, LEVANON REMARKED, THE KGB MAY HAVE SOMETHING UP ITS SLEEVE THAT THE OUTSIDE WORLD HAS NOT EVEN THOUGHT OF. VANCE

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